

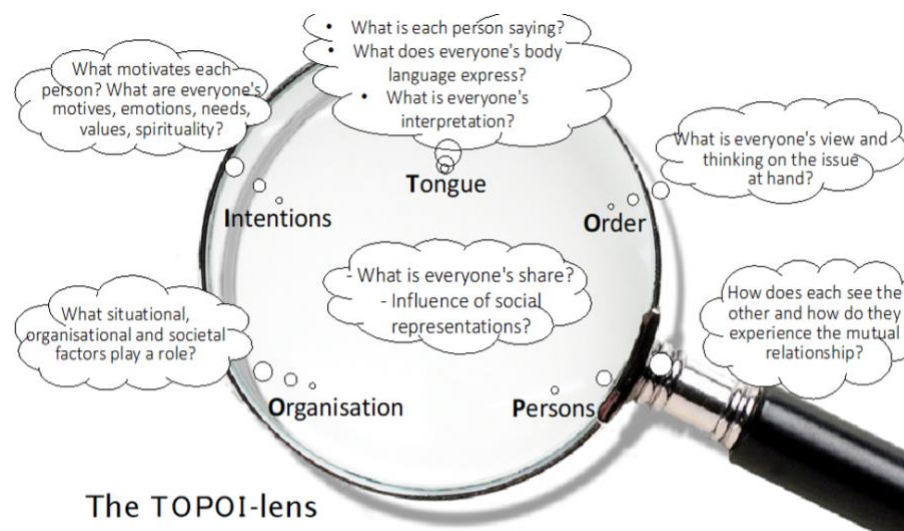
Introduction to the TOPOI model:

Hoffman's (2024) article challenges traditional approaches to intercultural communication and competence, which often rely on culturalist theories that reduce individuals to stereotypes based on national or ethnic backgrounds. He critiques the works of scholars like Geert Hofstede and Erin Meyer, arguing that these approaches oversimplify the complexity of human interaction by focusing on schematic cultures rather than individual uniqueness. Hoffman advocates for an "inclusive communication" approach that emphasizes the importance of recognizing both equality and diversity among individuals. He proposes that communication should focus on the actual people involved, considering their unique identities, life stories, and the specific contexts in which interactions occur. This approach humanizes communication, treating people as complex individuals rather than representatives of their culture.

To support this inclusive approach, Hoffman introduces the TOPOI model, a practical tool for analyzing and addressing potential misunderstandings in communication. The model focuses on five areas—Tongue, Order, Persons, Organization, and Intentions—where differences may arise. Unlike culturalist models, TOPOI is not bound by cultural or national labels but offers a broader perspective on communication, acknowledging the many factors that influence interactions.

Participant Instructions:

1. Read the TOPOI Model article from Hoffman (2024) entitled "[Inclusive Communication. Beyond intercultural communication and competence: 'Cultures don't meet, people do.'](#)"
2. Discuss in the large group:
 - What are the main critiques Hoffman raises about traditional culturalist approaches?
 - Think of a time when you used a culturalist approach in an intercultural exchange. What were your internal perceptions? What happened?
 - What are the pros of using the culturalist approach? What are the drawbacks of a culturalist approach?
 - In what ways does Hoffman argue for diversity competence?
3. Review the TOPOI model as a large group.



(Hoffman, 2024)

4. Continue the discussion with the following questions:
 - How do the five areas of the TOPOI model influence communication outcomes?
 - How can focusing on individuals rather than cultural stereotypes change the dynamics of communication?
 - How could the TOPOI model have influenced outcomes within the intercultural exchange you previously shared in this discussion?
 - How might your own communication style and biases affect your ability to communicate inclusively?
5. Apply the TOPOI Model and proceed with the case study and instructions below.

Case Study II: A multinational engineering team is working on a high-stakes project with a tight deadline. The team consists of members from the U.S., Germany, Japan, and Brazil. Tensions arise when decisions need to be made quickly, and team members struggle with differing communication styles. For instance, the German and American members prefer direct and assertive communication, while the Japanese and Brazilian members favor a more indirect and consensus-driven approach. A disagreement over the project timeline escalates, leading to frustration and decreased productivity.

Group Discussion: In small groups, students will analyze the conflict using the TOPOI model, focusing on how each component of the model might contribute to or help resolve the conflict.

- Tongue: How do different communication styles affect the team's ability to discuss timelines and responsibilities?
- Order: How do the team members' cultural norms regarding decision-making influence the conflict?
- Persons: What assumptions are team members making about each other's intentions based on their own cultural backgrounds?
- Organization: How might the organizational culture of the company or the project's structure contribute to the conflict?
- Intentions: What are the underlying intentions of each team member, and how might they be misunderstood?

Conflict Resolution Plan: Each group will create a conflict resolution plan based on the TOPOI model. The plan should outline steps to address the communication breakdown and promote effective collaboration. Groups should consider:

- Strategies for bridging communication style differences.
 - Ways to establish common ground and mutual understanding.
 - Methods for ensuring that all team members feel heard and respected.
6. Debrief: Reconvene as a large group and discuss conflict resolution plans:
 - What strategies did you employ to work toward conflict resolution to bridge the communication gap and promote effective collaboration?
 - How did the TOPOI model guide your conflict resolution plan creation?
 - What is your greatest takeaway from this activity?
 - How might you apply this takeaway in future interactions?